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THE REALIZATION OF ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

Letter dated 18 May 1993 from the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Iraq to the United Nations Office at Geneva addressed to the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights

The Permanent Mission of the Republic of Iraq to the United Nations Office at Geneva has the honour to request the circulation of the attached document on the detrimental effects of the economic embargo against the Iraqi people as an official document of the next session of the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities in view of the detrimental effects of the continuing embargo against the Iraqi people, which contravenes all practices and international charters that recognize the right of peoples to live in dignity.

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The detrimental effects of the economic embargo against the Iraqi people

The detrimental effects of the economic embargo against Iraq have clearly affected the entire Iraqi people in various aspects of their lives, particularly with regard to their medical and food requirements. The following provides a brief summary of the detrimental effects of the economic embargo in terms of health and food.

1. Detrimental effects in terms of health and medicine

The economic embargo imposed on Iraq has led to an acute and widescale shortage of all medicines and medical supplies; treatment and diagnostic services have been seriously affected, coupled with an adverse increase in the number of patients in Iraq, as the medicines used to treat children, such as antibiotics, sedatives, endothermics, antiemetics, antidiarrhoeals and ointments, are currently unavailable in the country. There are also no child vaccines. In terms of adults, the medicines and supplies used in treating common illnesses are unavailable; there are no vaccines, no antibiotics, no sedatives, none of the physiological fluids given intravenously, no hormones and even no eye drops. There are also no life-saving medicines, such as those used for heart patients and in operating theatres and laboratories. For that reason alone, the number of laboratory tests in October 1992, for example, dropped by 61.9 per cent compared with the average in 1989. Furthermore, owing to the unavailability of the most basic requirements for operations, such as nitrogen oxide gas, halothane, intravenous fluids, anaesthetics and so on, the number of operations in the month of October 1992, for instance, fell by 65 per cent compared with the average in 1989. The economic embargo has also produced a wide shortage of food and personal hygiene articles, which has in turn led to the outbreak of communicable diseases among both young and old, such as typhoid, infantile paralysis, tetanus, viral hepatitis, Giardia, German measles, kala-azar, undulant fever, hemorrhagic fever, croup, whooping cough, rickets, scabies, hydrocysts and rabies. The figures for these diseases are now extremely high compared to those for 1989. In addition, diseases which Iraq had finally eliminated, such as cholera and scabies, have reappeared. Malnutrition in expectant mothers and the unavailability of the tonics taken by pregnant women have affected the weight of newborn infants: of total newborn babies recorded in health establishments in October 1992, during the period of embargo, the monthly average of those weighing less than 2.5 kilograms was 17.9 per cent. Children are malnourished owing to the unavailability of milk, mothers are unable to breastfeed owing to severe malnutrition and infant foods are unobtainable, meaning that the embargo has greatly affected children under the age of five. With all the above factors combined, the embargo on medicine and food has caused the deaths of thousands of under-fives; in November 1992, the number of deaths was 5,113, whereas total deaths in November 1989 were 353.

For adults aged over 50, the total number of deaths attributable to the embargo in November 1992 amounted to 4,824, whereas the total for the same month in 1989 was 454.

2. Detrimental effects of the embargo on food

One of the overall effects of the unjust economic embargo is that the food consumption quota of the Iraqi citizen has fallen to 50 per cent, while imports by the Ministry of Trade, as an annual average during the period of embargo, have fallen to 86 per cent compared with the volume of imports under normal circumstances. The price of basic foodstuffs has also risen to extremely high levels, thereby constituting a heavy burden on the consumer, particularly the middle and lower classes.

A simple comparison between the monthly individual quota for basic foodstuffs before and after the embargo shows the extent of the enforced consumer shortage experienced by citizens as a result of the unjust economic embargo. For example, the individual flour quota prior to the embargo was 15 kilograms, whereas after the embargo it fell to 9 kilograms, representing a reduction of 40 per cent. Rice quotas similarly fell from 3 kilograms to 2.25 kilograms, representing a reduction of 31.6 per cent. Individual sugar quotas also fell from 3.51 kilograms to 1.5 kilograms, representing a reduction of 57.3 per cent. The same applies to other basic foodstuffs.

Although the Ministry of Trade has endeavoured to increase the quota and availability of certain foodstuffs, the normal individual consumption level for foodstuffs has not been attained; the proportion of some items is below 30 per cent of the fixed quota for citizens before the embargo. Moreover, the fact that numerous contracts have been prejudiced and the fluidity of others has been hindered, coupled with the freezing of Iraqi assets and reserves abroad, has led to a large increase in the price of foodstuffs.

A straightforward comparative study of the prices of basic foodstuffs sold on local markets in May 1992 and May 1993, for example, shows the extent of the increase in the prices of such items. The price of 50 kilograms of flour, for instance, rose from 210.6 Iraqi dinars in May 1992 to 525 Iraqi dinars in May 1993, representing an increase of 149 per cent. Similarly, the price of 50 kilograms of rice rose from 254.9 Iraqi dinars to 450 Iraqi dinars, representing an increase of 77 per cent, while the price of 50 kilograms of sugar rose from 312.8 Iraqi dinars to 600 Iraqi dinars, representing an increase of 92 per cent. The same also applies to the other basic foodstuffs.